

Amendments to the Specification:

Please replace the paragraph beginning at page 14, line 16, with the following rewritten paragraph:

Then the upper punch 4 16 is lowered further so as to insert the protruding portion 18a of the floating punch 18 into the third through hole 16a of the upper punch 16, and further the upper punch 16 is gradually lowered so as to apply pressure gradually on the ceramic material powder. At this time, the floating punch 18 is also lowered gradually as the upper punch 16 is lowered.

Please replace the paragraph beginning at page 14, line 21 and line 23, with the following rewritten paragraph:

When the upper punch 3 16 has come to a position immediately before the end of compression (before the bottom dead point) in region b of Fig. 6, the floating punch 18 is forcibly lowered a little as shown in Fig. 4(c) and Fig. 5 (c). Then the upper punch 3 16 is lowered to the end point of compression (the bottom dead point), thereby completing the molding operation.

Please replace the paragraph beginning at page 15, line 1 and 2, with the following rewritten paragraph:

As the upper punch 3 16 is lowered to a position immediately before the end of compression (before the bottom dead point), and then the upper punch 3 16 is further lowered to the end point of compression (the bottom dead point), as described above, the ceramic material powder is fluidized on the inclined bottom surface 13 of the support member 10 shown in Fig. 1 through Fig. 3 thereby preventing the ceramic material powder from clogging therein. As a result, the portion of the inclined bottom surface 13 and other portion can be molded with similar densities.

Please replace the paragraph beginning at page 15, line 8, with the following rewritten paragraph:

Then in region d of Fig. 6, as shown in Fig. 4(d) and Fig. 5(d), the upper punch 3 16 is lifted and the die 15 is lowered so as to take out the ceramic compact.